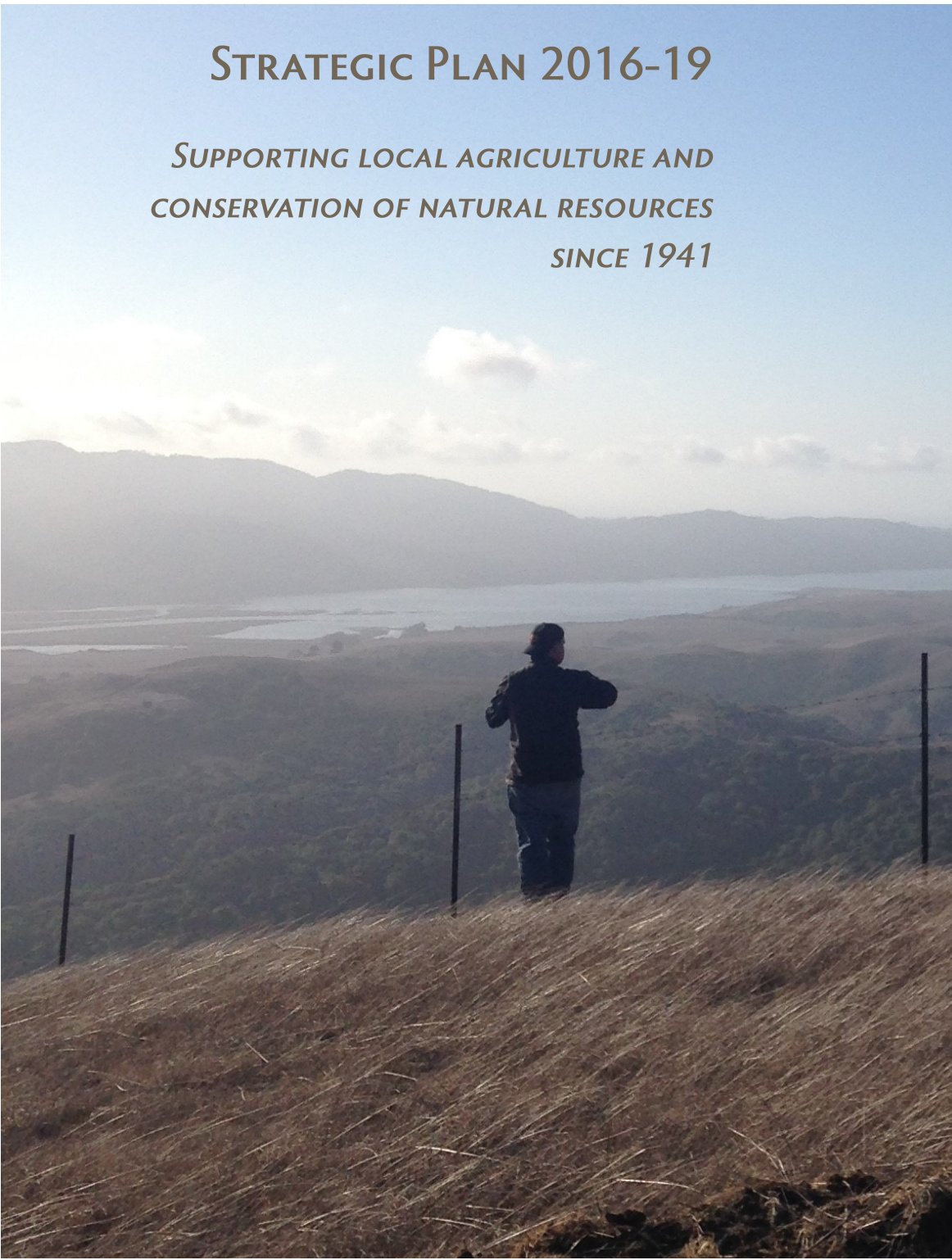




# STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-19

*SUPPORTING LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND  
CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
SINCE 1941*



# 2016-19 STRATEGIC PLAN

GOLD RIDGE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

SUPPORTING LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES SINCE 1941.

2776 Sullivan Road | Sebastopol, CA 95472 | 707.823.5244

[www.goldridgercd.org](http://www.goldridgercd.org)

## **OUR VISION: WHAT WE ARE BUILDING**

*Our vision is for a district with healthy and sustainable natural resources including clean sufficient water, diverse wildlife, resilient landscapes and thriving agriculture that are in balance with human communities, now and for future generations.*

## **OUR MISSION: WHY THE RCD EXISTS**

*Our mission is to provide:*

- *technical assistance,*
- *access to funding,*
- *education,*
- *community facilitation,*
- *natural resources planning,*
- *voluntary natural resource monitoring, and*
- *efficient and impactful use of public funding cooperation with others*

*in partnership with land owners, land managers and all other members of our community.*

## **WHY RCDs EXIST: OUR MANDATE, OUR PURPOSE**

Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are one of California’s earliest grassroots conservation organizations that identify conservation needs and support local land managers in implementing solutions on a voluntary basis. The catastrophic soil losses of the Dust Bowl sparked national and state recognition that soil erosion was the greatest challenge to the country’s ability to feed its people and be a leader in agricultural production. RCDs were conceived by the federal government and exist across the country. RCDs were sanctioned by the State of California in 1938 to provide assistance to local managers in addressing soil and resource conservation challenges.

## **DESCRIPTION: WHO WE ARE**

In 1941, the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District was established as one of the original resource conservation districts, the first in Sonoma County and the seventh in California. The RCD is a “special district,” a legal subdivision of the state, created under Division 9 of the California Public Resources Code to protect and enhance soil and water resources. Examples of other independent, special districts are park and open space districts, mosquito abatement districts, and flood control and water districts.

The RCD is a trusted member of the agricultural community and functions well as a liaison between regulatory agencies and agricultural landowners and producers. We have a professional, dedicated staff and management team.

We work with ranchers, farmers, partner agencies and others to implement agricultural and resource management programs primarily on agricultural lands to help preserve and enhance natural resources for future generations. We also work with rural and urban populations to address natural resource concerns.

RCDs work only on a voluntary basis and are not regulatory, making us a trusted resource for our community. Gold Ridge RCD is approximately 98% grant funded. The RCD is governed by a locally appointed, independent board of directors. The 134,000-acre district hosts diverse resources of the region including; rangeland, woodland, wildlife habitat, vineyards, dairies, orchards, cropland, streams, wetlands, coastal areas, as well as rural and urban areas.

The 96 RCDs in the state of California help solve California's pressing statewide issues like climate change, food security, reducing the impact of drought and floods, protecting clean water, creating and improving habitat for fish and wildlife, restoring critical habitat for endangered and threatened species like Coho salmon, and reducing the risk of wildfire, all through local action. RCDs work citizen-to-citizen to build better communities, better economies and a better environment.

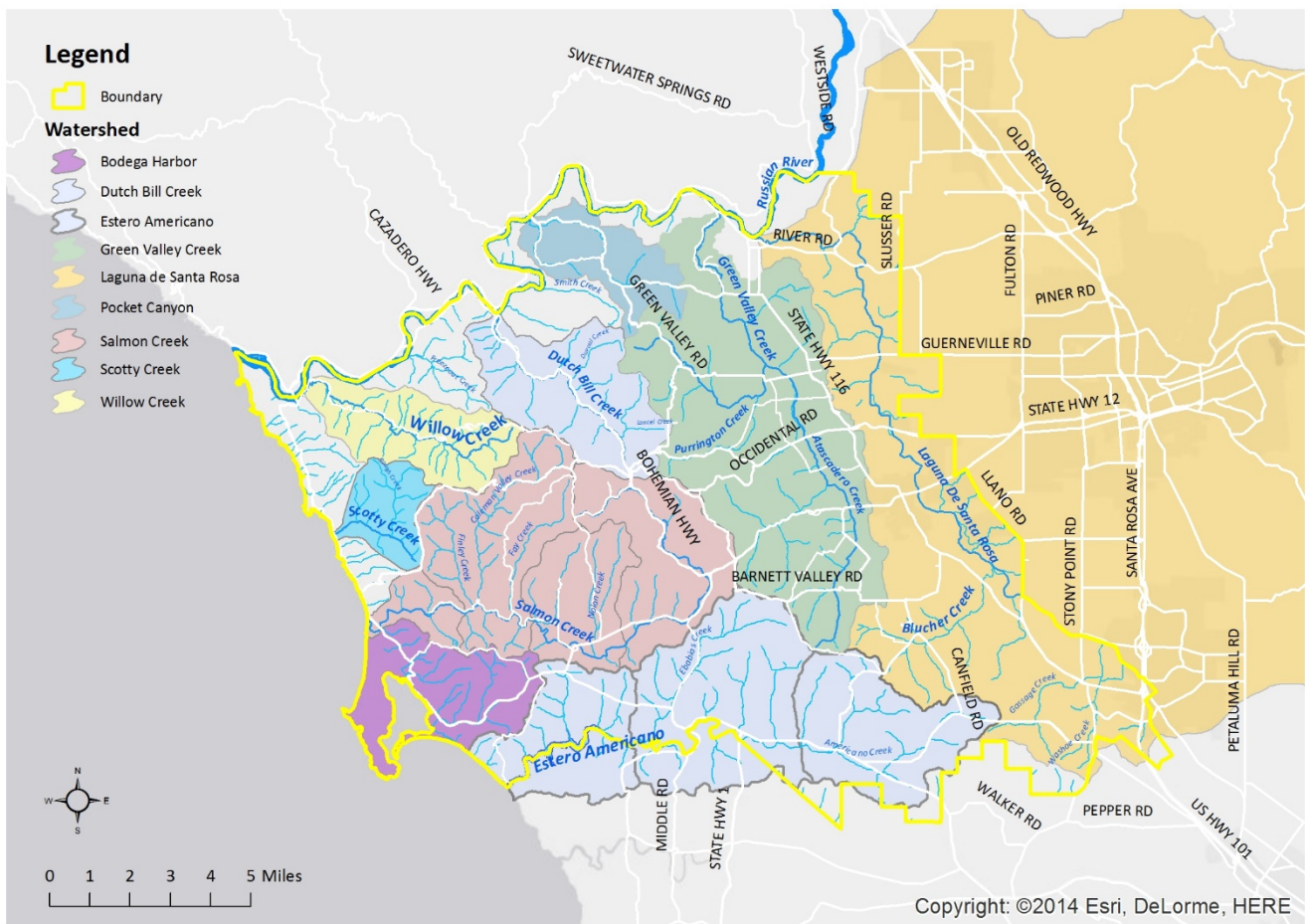
## OUR AUDIENCE

The Gold Ridge RCD's audience is our community at large, and in specific, these members: Landowners, land managers, local water companies/agencies, students, parents, teachers, contractors, and volunteers. Our audience should capture everyone and anyone interested in conserving or restoring natural resources.

## OUTREACH METHODS

- Write grant proposals;
- Present at conferences;
- Develop and distribute brochures;
- Write articles for and distribute an annual RCD newsletter;
- Write articles for and distribute a monthly electronic newsletter sharing RCD and partner news;
- Add information, videos, and photos to RCD website;

- Inform and learn from landowners by attending farmer meetings and other events;
- Offer workshops and field trips;
- Develop and advertise educational materials;
- Place informational signs at project sites;
- Collaborate with volunteers;
- Develop a donor-base of support, and charge fees for tours/outings if possible;
- Hold stake-holder meetings;
- Maintain social media presence through Facebook and the RCD blog.



Our primary geographic areas are the watersheds of Atascadero and Green Valley Creek, Dutch Bill Creek, Estero Americano, Laguna de Santa Rosa, the lower Russian River (including the Estuary), Salmon Creek, Sonoma Coast and Willow Creek. Our District includes the City of Sebastopol and the towns and rural areas of Bloomfield, Bodega, Bodega Bay, Forestville, Graton, Monte Rio, Occidental, and Valley Ford.

## OUR NATURAL RESOURCE PRIORITIES

- Sustainable diverse agriculture
- Climate change resiliency
- Clean water, water conservation and water supply sustainability
- Education, awareness and outreach about resource conservation
- Resource conservation projects built on sound science
- Diverse and resilient wildlife
- Soil health and conservation
- Watershed and natural resource planning and enhancement

## OUR STRATEGIES: HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR MISSION

We are committed to achieving our mission and vision by advancing the following strategies.

1. **NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION:** Initiate and sustain relevant, outstanding, and voluntary resource conservation programs that positively impact soil, water, agriculture and wildlife.
2. **COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS:** Foster and encourage positive and collaborative relationships with agricultural and residential landowners, local, state and federal resource agencies and other members of the community.
3. **PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION:** Provide agricultural and natural resource conservation educational opportunities for students, landowners, and land managers.
4. **BOARD LEADERSHIP:** Develop board leadership and diversity, and attract new directors and associate directors to expand Gold Ridge RCD's capacity to achieve its mission, vision and strategic plan objectives.
5. **FINANCIAL STRENGTH:** Increase financial strength through income for fee-based services and contributions from the private sector. Develop and adopt a financial sustainability plan.
6. **ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH:** Create the necessary resources to accomplish our mission, vision and objectives. Annually evaluate progress toward achieving our strategic plan and revise it accordingly. Encourage employee satisfaction and retention by offering attractive wage, benefit and retirement plans, satisfying and fulfilling work, and opportunities for professional development.

## OUR OBJECTIVES / PLANNED ACTIONS 2016-2019

These are our objectives and planned actions, inspired by our vision, mission and priority natural resource concerns, to be accomplished July 2016 to June 2019. Effecting change in landscapes requires working within the interconnected layers of our natural world. In the programs described below we have attempted to not be

repetitive, as many of our projects could be categorized in multiple programs which intertwine themes such as clean water, instream flow, and climate resiliency.

CLIMATE RESILIENCY AND CARBON FARMING: The Gold Ridge RCD, in partnership with our community, aims to assist in natural resource conservation in the face of climate change. Our strategies for climate resiliency are based on sound science and benefit the environment, agriculture, and our cultural and ecological communities. We work with our partners to develop and fund programs which reduce greenhouse gases, increase carbon sequestration, improve on-farm and community water security, and enhance wildlife habitat.

- Complete eight Carbon Farm Plans;
- Implement five Carbon Farm Plans;
- Increase creation of and access to compost;
- Provide soil health information and soil testing services;
- Develop three demonstration projects.

LANDSMART™ PLANNING: The Gold Ridge RCD, in partnership with the Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino RCDs, participates in LandSmart planning. Prepared with landowners or land managers, LandSmart plans describe the natural and agricultural resources of the property, document the practices that protect natural resources, identify opportunities to maintain or improve the quality of natural resources, and prioritize management practices according to clients' needs, goals, and timelines. LandSmart plans are also designed to assist with regulatory compliance.

- Prepare LandSmart plans on 2,000 acres.

ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE: The Gold Ridge RCD, in partnership with our community, helps landowners understand and voluntarily comply with or exceed federal, state and local regulations.

- Assist agricultural and rural landowners and managers with reporting and regulatory requirements.
- Anticipate future regulations and requirements and develop strategies for assisting landowners and managers in our district.

STREAMFLOW ENHANCEMENT AND WATER CONSERVATION: The Gold Ridge RCD works cooperatively with landowners and land managers to meet domestic and agricultural water needs in our district, while ensuring that streams in district watersheds have sufficient flow to support aquatic and riparian ecosystems. We work with our partners to develop, fund and implement projects that conserve water, reduce extractive demand on water sources,

increase water supply security, and reduce excess storm runoff, including off-channel storage, rainwater catchment and hydrology projects. Projects aim to restore multiple natural resource functions and increase community water security.

- Develop 15 new storage-based water supply projects;
- Evaluate opportunities to enhance streamflow and improve groundwater recharge throughout high priority salmon bearing watersheds;
- Create a plan to further expand the water security program throughout the district;
- Publish project how-to documents for community education;
- Develop a brochure highlighting streamflow enhancement and water conservation fee-for-service options;
- Secure funding to carry out streamflow enhancement and water conservation program projects.

CLEAN WATER: The Gold Ridge RCD plans and implements projects aimed at improving water quality throughout our district for wildlife and people. The RCD provides information, training in practical skills, and opportunities to participate in projects that help enhance water quality, prevent non-point source pollution, and protect aquatic ecosystems.

- Develop a stormwater management plan for the Atascadero Creek subwatershed;
- Implement five sediment reduction projects;
- Implement 5,000 linear feet of riparian improvements;
- Develop 20 water quality improvement projects on agricultural lands;
- Utilize and improve the Nutrient Tracking Tool (NTT) to quantify the water quality benefits made through conservation practices on farms and ranches.

SCIENCE, MONITORING & PLANNING: The Gold Ridge RCD establishes and builds on the scientific foundation that informs our collaborations with landowners, community groups and agencies. With many partners, the RCD assesses and documents environmental conditions and trends, and uses this information to guide activities and evaluate proposed management projects and strategies. The RCD disseminates this information through workshops, reports & educational presentations with the aim of increasing involvement in resource conservation efforts.

- Conduct streamflow monitoring in priority, salmonid-bearing watersheds;
- Conduct biological surveys (such as fish population surveys) in Salmon Creek, Atascadero Creek, and Estero Americano watersheds;



- Conduct water quality monitoring;
- Disseminate data from monitoring and surveying activities;
- Secure permits to study and handle endangered and threatened species, such as California red-legged frog, Coho salmon, California freshwater shrimp and California tiger salamanders;
- Secure funding to generate, analyze and report on streamflow and water quality monitoring data;
- Secure funding to study project effectiveness through science and monitoring.

WILDLIFE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT: The Gold Ridge RCD collaborates with and educates partners and landowners throughout the district to restore and enhance habitat for native wildlife, including riparian & wetland habitat restoration, instream improvements, and promotion of on-farm biodiversity. The RCD spearheads a wide range of activities, including expansion of riparian corridors, improvement of instream salmonid habitat, and enhancement of agricultural lands to better support native biodiversity.

- Implement 5,000 linear feet of riparian improvements;
- Restore at least two miles of instream habitat along key stream reaches;
- Develop off-stream habitat enhancement projects along key stream reaches;
- Publish a guide to the community on creating wildlife habitat within the district.

AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: The RCD creates educational experiences for our community, which inspire and encourage a connection to and an appreciation for the conservation of land and its agricultural and natural resources. The RCD offers presentations, demonstrations, workshops and site visits for district landowners, land managers and residents of all ages to access information and educational resources in order to acquire skills to benefit natural resources.

- Coordinate regional educational outreach to avoid duplication among local agencies;
- Offer 30 field trips and classroom visits to teachers, students and their parents to privately-owned farms, ranches, and dairies protected with agricultural easements purchased with public funds;
- Have at least 150 district landowners attend workshops;
- Have half of participating Teaching Environmental and Agricultural Memories (TEAM) program students come from underserved schools;
- Outreach to two additional schools each year in TEAM program;
- Develop curriculum for one additional field trip site;
- Develop materials to conduct three workshops per year on topics such as soil health, carbon farming, water conservation, off-channel habitat, streamflow enhancement;

- Conduct outreach to the public on RCD projects at community events and conferences;
- Secure funding to continue TEAM program for another three years.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY: Gold Ridge RCD can sustainably provide service to our community only if we are relevant, excellent and visible. The Gold Ridge RCD will continue to make decisions that increase our ability to be the best RCD possible.

- Update, organize and create RCD policies, procedures and templates;
- Direct additional resources to administration;
- Include other pillars of the community into projects (e.g. churches, schools, parks and volunteer groups);
- Increase the visibility, enhance the RCD brand and blend marketing into decision making;
- Increase support for rural residential landowners;
- Receive ongoing funding support from the County;
- Target annual revenue for Gold Ridge RCD at \$2,000,000 with an annual surplus of 1% or \$20,000 to be used as a reserve and improve cash flow;
- Develop three-year program work plans;
- Evaluate human resources, operational, and capital requirements for achieving next fiscal year's strategic plan objectives four months prior to each new fiscal year, and adjust staff, board or volunteer hours, operational and capital budgets to support each year's plan.

POTENTIAL NEW PROGRAMS: Proposed new programs for the RCD to develop include the following.

- Agricultural land preservation and management;
- Sustaining diverse agriculture;
- Tool library for farmers;
- Urban and rural stormwater management;
- Rural residential resource management;
- Irrigation efficiency assistance;
- California Tiger Salamander project regulatory assurance;
- Assist in the creation of a regional/statewide RCD Integrated Data Management Network System.